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Testimony in support of HB 6517 - AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE TO ANALYZE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAWS GOVERNING DYSLEXIA INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING.

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

I am a parent of a young adult with dyslexia, whom I realized was struggling with reading in kindergarten. Although his teacher assured me he was “fine” and the we should just “monitor him,” I knew something was wrong. At the time, I had been working as an education advocate for several years and was president of the Learning Disabilities Association of Connecticut. I knew the signs of dyslexia. However, his teacher didn’t know. The reading specialist didn’t know. The special education teacher didn’t know. And the reason they didn’t know the signs of dyslexia was that they had never been taught. This simply wasn’t part of their college training.

In 2006, none of Emerson’s teachers, not even the reading specialists, knew anything about structured literacy or teaching students with dyslexia to read. This is because the training they received in their teacher preparation programs didn’t actually prepare them to teach reading to anyone, let alone students with dyslexia. *Unfortunately, this is still true of most teacher preparation programs today.* It is wonderful that Connecticut has passed laws to change this, but the dyslexia task force found that these laws are still not being operationalized. This is something we can repair, as outlined in the report of the dyslexia task force.

Because in 2006 I did know the signs of dyslexia, I made sure my son was evaluated in kindergarten. And I made sure Emerson received appropriate reading instruction that was based on the science of reading. Since it wasn’t available in his school, we paid privately for structured literacy intervention starting in kindergarten, and as a result, Emerson’s dyslexia was completely remediated. Emerson is now a sophomore in college, and he says that the best thing I ever did was to make sure he learned how to read. He said that, if he hadn’t learned how to read, he probably wouldn’t have been able to learn anything else. And the data shows that that is often true. Without being able to read well, children with dyslexia are at high risk for dropping out of school, for becoming depressed or suicidal, for being unemployed/under-employed, and for ending up in the prison system. If a child doesn’t learn to read well, they lose access to everything. Simply by preparing our teachers and reading specialists, we can change this trajectory.

It is not only students with dyslexia that will benefit from this legislation. According to SBAC data, Connecticut fails to teach about 50% of third graders to read on grade level--and many of these

students do not have dyslexia. If our teachers and reading specialists receive adequate training in structured literacy--which takes years and must include supervised practicum--they will be able to teach nearly any child to read--including those with and without dyslexia.

Yes, this type of teacher preparation is expensive, but the cost of NOT doing it is much higher. With the right training, our teachers and reading specialists can teach about 95% of all children to read on grade level. We should accept nothing less. Our children are depending on us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ding", followed by a long horizontal line.